

**HANDOUT**

# Exploring the Purpose of Poetry

**Directions:** In your “expert” group, read your passage out loud two times. Then discuss the questions, recording notes in the space provided. When your teacher instructs you to, move to your “teaching” group to share your passage and engage in the accompanying discussion.

In her TED Talk, spoken-word poet Amanda Gorman states, “The decision to create, the artistic choice to have a voice, the choice to be heard is the most political act of all. And by ‘political’ I mean poetry is political in at least three ways . . .”<sup>1</sup> She goes on to explain what these three ways are.

## Step 1: “Expert” Group Discussion Questions

1. *“One: What stories we tell, when we’re telling them, how we’re telling them, if we’re telling them, why we’re telling them, says so much about the political beliefs we have, about what types of stories matter.”*

How do the stories we tell and how we tell them reflect what types of stories matter?

What stories do you see and hear being told in what you read online and watch on television? Who is telling them? Whose stories are not being told?

What question(s) does this quotation raise for you?

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<sup>1</sup> Amanda Gorman, “[Using Your Voice Is a Political Choice](#),” TED Talk, November 2018.

2. *“Secondly, who gets to have their stories told—I’m talking, who is legally allowed to read, who has the resources to be able to write, who are we reading in our classrooms—says a lot about the political and educational systems that all these stories and storytellers exist in.”*

What can the stories we read in school tell us about the political and educational systems that we live in?

Who do you think decides which stories get to be told in schools and who gets to tell them?

What question(s) does this quotation raise for you?

3. *“Lastly, poetry is political because it’s preoccupied with people. If you look at history, notice that tyrants often go after the poets and the creatives first. They burn books, they try to get rid of poetry and the language arts, because they’re terrified of them. Poets have this phenomenal potential to connect the beliefs of the private individual with the cause of change of the public, the population, the polity, the political movement.”*

What examples can you think of when political leaders ordered books to be burned or writing to be censored?

What is one way that a poet might connect a personal belief with a public cause? How about other artists, like musicians or writers or muralists?

What question(s) does this quotation raise for you?

## Step 2: "Teaching" Group Discussion Questions

**Directions:** In your new groups, share one interesting idea that emerged from your first discussion and your group's question. Take some time to discuss everyone's questions. Then discuss the following questions together.

1. What do you think Gorman means when she says that poetry is political? How does her TED Talk help you answer this question?
2. Amanda Gorman gives three reasons why she believes poetry is political. Which reason do you think is her strongest? What makes you say that?
3. After listening to her TED Talk and reflecting more deeply on a section of her presentation, how do you think Amanda Gorman would finish this statement: *The purpose of poetry is . . . ?*